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ABSTRACT

To study the effects of writers' attending to the informational needs of their readers (episodic perspective taking), each of 65 college freshmen was randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions: (1) no attention to audience, (2) attention to audience during prewriting, and (3) attention to audience during revising. All three groups received the same set of instructions for drafting and revising their essays and questions. Students' pretest and posttest writing samples were scored for development, organization, syntax, coherence, diction, attention to audience, and overall quality. Results indicated that attending to audience during revising was an effective strategy for improving some features of students' writing. (Author/HOD)

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Empirical Considerations of Episodic Perspective Taking

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Running Head: EPISODIC PERSPECTIVE TAKING

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Minneapolis, 21 March 1985.

Abstract

The study investigated the effects of writers' attending to the informational needs of their readers(episodic perspective taking). Specifically, each of 65 college freshman was randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions: 1) no attention to audience, 2) attention to audience during prewriting, and 3) attention to audience during revising. Students' pre- and post-test writing samples were scored for development, organization, syntax, coherence, diction, attention to audience, and overall quality. Results indicated that attending to audience during revising is an effective strategy for improving some features of students' writing.

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Empirical Considerations of Episodic Perspective Taking

Method

Subjects

Subjects for the present study were 65 students enrolled in three sections of English 101, the first "regular-track" course of the two-semester freshman composition requirement at the University of Arizona. Placement in the course is based on the ACT or SAT's TSWE score combined with a holistic score on a short impromptu essay. A student with an ACT of under 14 may get into 101 if he or she scores a 7 or 8 on the essay. (An essay score is determined by adding together the scores of 2 raters who have rated the essay on a 4-point scale.) A student with an ACT score of 31 may also be placed in 101 if the essay score is only a 2 or a 3. In terms of TSWE scores, a student may gain 101 placement with a score as low as 37 if he or she earns a 6, 7, or 8 on the essay. On the other hand, a TSWE score as high as 60 may also result in a 101 placement if the student earns only a 2 or 3 on the essay.

Because there were incomplete sets of data from 17 students, data from 48 students were used in the study. Of those 48, 13 were in the control group, 17 were in the prewriting group, and 18 were in the revising group.)

Stimulus Materials

The three of us developed a generic set of directions to guide students through the drafting of their essays. These

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directions were intended to remind students of some of the considerations specified in the written assignment, which had been given to students in all sections of 101. That assignment asked students first to write about a topic they cared and knew about. Second, it asked them to consider an audience consisting of peers. Third, the assignment vaguely outlined a purpose for the assignment. Fourth, the assignment reminded students to consider modes appropriate to their purposes and topics. Fifth, the assignment asked students to edit carefully. (The original assignment appears in Table 1, the first page of your packets.)

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition to the generic directions, we prepared 4 generic questions that students were to answer in short written responses. The generic directions and questions were given to all students in the study. However, approximately one-third of the students were to answer 4 more questions, designed to encourage them to focus on episodic perspective taking as they drafted their essays. That is, they were asked to consider their readers' knowledge of the topic. (The generic prewriting directions, the four generic questions and the four episodic perspective taking questions appear in Table 2, the second page of your packets.)

Insert Table 2 about here

The we also developed a generic set of directions to guide

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students as they revised their essays. These directions reminded students to consider development, organization, and even editorial matters as they revised. Following the directions, four generic questions focused on the same concerns. Again, all students in the study received these directions and questions. However, one-third of the students were asked to write short responses to four questions intended to focus their attention on episodic perspective taking as they revised. (The generic revising directions, the four generic questions, and the four episodic perspective taking questions appear in Table 3, the third page of your packets.)

Insert Table 3 about here

Procedures

Each of the 65 students in the present study was randomly assigned to one of 3 treatment groups: 1) control group, 2) prewriting group, and 3) revising group. All 3 groups received the aforementioned generic directions and questions both for drafting and revising. The drafting directions and questions were distributed to students when they received the written assignment for the essay, and the revising instructions were distributed when the early drafts were returned to students.

Students in the prewriting group received episodic-perspective- taking questions when the generic directions and questions for drafting were distributed.

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Students in the revising group received episodic-perspective-taking questions when the generic directions and questions were distributed.

When instructors collected students' early and revised versions of the essays, we photocopied the papers and returned them to instructors the same day. This procedure, like others in the study, was followed to allow instructors to maintain normal routines in their classrooms.

Design and Analysis

The study employed a repeated measures design with one trial factor (version: original and revision) and one grouping factor (treatment: control, prewriting, revising).

Scoring

Two experienced university composition instructors scored the essays for development, organization, syntax, coherence, and diction. Two experienced university composition instructors scored the essays for overall quality (holistically) and for the degree of attention to audience. Both sets of judges employed four-point scales on all dependent measures. For each measure, scores from the two judges were added together to create a composite score, which was later subjected to statistical analyses. Before the papers were scored, original and revised versions were mixed together with names removed.

For the purpose of calculating agreement between judges, identical scores or scores that differed by only 1 point were considered instances of agreement. Scores that differed by 2 or 3

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points were considered instances of disagreement. For the 2 judges who scored the original and revised versions for diction, syntax, organization, coherence, and development, the percentage of agreement was 100% on all 10 measures. For the 2 judges who scored both versions for overall quality and attention to audience, the percentages of agreement were as follows: 95.8% for original holistic, 83.3% for original audience, 95.8% for revised holistic, and 83.3% for revised audience.

Results

We first subjected gain scores for the three treatment groups to one-way analyses of variance. ANOVA results indicated a significant treatment effect only for one dependent measure: coherence, F (2,45) = 4.263, p = .0202. To further examine this effect, we used a Scheffe a posteriori contrasts test, which indicated that the mean gain score in coherence was significantly higher for the revising group than for the control group. While the control group and the prewriting group each experienced negative gains (or losses) in coherence scores (M = -.31, SD = 1.44 and M = -.06, SD =.97, respectively), the revising group experienced a gain of .72 (SD = .75) for that score. ANOVA results indicated that treatment effects for 2 other dependent measures approached statistical significance. The p-value for gain scores in organization was p = .0748, and for gain scores in syntax it was p = .0896. ANOVA results for gains in diction, development, attention to audience, and overall quality did not approach statistical significance.

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Expecting the prewriting group to perform better than the other two groups did on original versions of the essays, we submitted each of the seven dependent measures for that version to a one-way ANOVA. Results indicated that there were no significant differences on the original version for any of the seven measures.

We next looked more specifically at differences between the prewriting and revising treatments for each of the dependent measures mentioned above. We used a series of t-tests to examine the effects of these treatments. For 4 of the measures (gains in diction, development, attention to audience, and overall quality) we found no significant differences between the prewiting and revising groups. However, t-tests did reveal significant differences for the remaining three measures: gains in syntax, organization, and coherence. Those results appear in Table 4:

Table 4

Significant Gain-Score Differences for Two Treatment Groups

	Prewriting Group		Revising Group			
Measure	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
syntax	.06	.66	.67	1.14	-2.32	.028
organization	.00	1.00	.89	1.41	-2.16	.039
coherence	-.06	.97	.72	.75	-2.66	.012

Incidentally, the gains for the control group on each of these three measures were as follows:

	M	SD
syntax	.29	.99
organization	-.08	1.55

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coherence -.31 1.44

We were also interested in overall gain scores--scores for the three groups combined. For this purpose we ran a series of matched-pairs t-tests between scores on original and revised drafts. Those t-tests indicated that revising resulted in gains for all 7 measures, but there were no significant differences. Those gains ranged from a low of .167 for coherence to a high of .50 for overall quality.

We also wanted to examine the strength of relationships between sets of measures for the 48 sets of papers included in the study. To do this, we computed Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients for each of all possible sets of measures for each draft of the papers and for the gains. Table 5 contains Pearson coefficients for those variables that were most strongly related--those with r's greater than .60. Each of the correlations was significant at or below the .001 level.

Table 5

Correlations Between Selected Sets of Variables

Correlations on Original Drafts

diction/syntax	.79
diction/development	.64
organization/coherence	.73
organization/development	.75
coherence/development	.62
overall/audience	.69

Correlations on Revised Drafts

diction/syntax	.73
diction/coherence	.72
diction/development	.66
syntax/organization	.64

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syntax/coherence	.77
syntax/development	.70
organization/coherence	.85
organization/development	.86
coherence/development	.88
overall/audience	.83

Correlations for Gain Scores

organization/coherence	.69
organization/development	.71
overall/audience	.61

Discussion

For several reasons, we wish to be cautious in interpreting the results of this study. First, we need to remind you that subject mortality was high. When we initially entered the three sections of English 101 to give directions to students, there were 78 students enrolled in those sections. By the time we gathered the first batch of data, 13 students had dropped those sections. And then, when we had finished gathering data, we had complete sets from only 48 students. As a result, we ended up with relatively small group sizes.

We need to be cautious for a second reason, which relates to students' responses to the generic and episodic-perspective-taking questions. We did remove from the study any student who did not respond to every question, and this procedure did worsen the subject mortality problem. We did not, however, make any qualitative or quantitative distinctions among types of responses to questions. We did notice, however, --and we must confess--that some of those responses were perfunctory. All responses assured us that students had read the questions, but some left us wondering how much thought students had invested in their

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responses.

Even given our propensity for caution, though, there seems to be some room for optimism. First, ANOVA results indicated that the revising group had a significantly greater gain in coherence than did the control group. Further, ANOVA results indicated that gains in organization and syntax were nearly significant.

Also, t-tests indicated that the revising group had significantly greater gains than the prewriting group on the measures of syntax, organization, and coherence. Additionally, that group had greater gains, although not significant ones, on development and overall quality.

These results seem to suggest, but by no means prove, that episodic-perspective-taking exercises may aid students as they revise. The fact that the prewriting group did not out-perform the other groups on the original versions, though, seems also to suggest that episodic-perspective-taking exercises may be more effective as revising exercises than prewriting exercises.

These results seem to support some of Peter Elbow's notions about audience. In Writing With Power, Elbow comments on audience as early as the first page of the first chapter. He does not give it full attention, though, until Chapter 17, the first of four chapters dealing with audience. By this point in the book, as you recall, he has, for the most part, finished discussing invention strategies. He explores a variety of ways that audiences affect writers. In Chapter 18, entitled "Audience as Focusing Force," he "concentrate[s] on audience as a kind of magnetic field which exerts an organizing or focusing force on our words. As we come

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closer to an audience, its field of force tends to pull our words into shapes or configurations determined by its needs or point of view. As we move farther away from the audience, our words are freer to rearrange themselves, to bubble and change and develop, to follow their own whims, without any interference from the needs or orientation of the audience" (p. 191). Well, I don't know that I can say that Elbow would take delight in our results, but it does seem that our results coincide with Elbow's notions about the time to ask writers to seriously consider audiences.

Our results also relate to some of the findings of Linda Flower and John Hayes. In their article "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," which appeared in the February issue of CCC, they state: "A rhetorical situation is the [illegible] we assign to the givens with which a writer must work, namely, the audience and assignment" (p. 26). They go on to note that, "The writer's initial analysis of the assignment and audience was usually brief. Most writers--both novice and expert--plunged quickly into generating ideas, but often returned to reconsider these givens later" (p. 26). In the article, Flower and Hayes go on to talk about a writer's considering "the effect the writer wants to have on the reader". They note that "One of the hallmarks of the goods writers was the time they spent thinking about how they wanted to affect the reader" (p. 27). Flower and Hayes conclude the article by noting that "the ability to explore a rhetorical problem is eminently teachable" (p. 31). The results of our study suggest that this ability may be easily teachable.

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In their article "Plans That Guide the Composing Process," which appears in Fredericksen and Dominic's Writing: Process, Development, and Communication (LEA, 1981), describe "reader-based plans" for producing a paper. These "Reader-focuses plans occur when writers spend a great deal of time considering who their audience is and developing plans or strategies based on what the reader might assume, objects to, or need to know" (p. 48). Again in this article, they assert that teachers need to "intervene at points in the writing process that could do writers the most good--as they are actually engaged in the act of writing" (p. 55). And again our results seem to suggest the same thing--at least in terms of audience awareness.

If I may dwell a little longer on the work of Flower and Hayes--or at least the work of half of that team, Linda Flower. In the Second Edition of her book, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing, she gives nine "steps and strategies for the composing process." The fifth step is to "Know the Needs of Your Reader," and the sixth is to "Transform Writer-Based Prose Into Reader-Based Prose." As with Elbow, Flower treats this focus on audience after she has treated invention strategies. Her notions about attention to audience, like Elbow's, coincide with what our results suggest: that attention to episodic perspective taking can be an aid to revising.

Sondra Perl, in her December 1980 CCC article entitled "Understanding Composing," refers to this attention as projective structuring, which she defines as "the ability to craft what one intends to say so that it is intelligible to others" (p. 368) She

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states that projective structuring fails to help a writer if he or she treats it as the whole process, rather than a part of it. She adds that "For projective structuring to function fully, writers need to draw on their capacity to move away from their own words, to decenter from the page, and to project themselves into the role of the reader" (p. 368).

Finally, and more generally, I think that our results seem to correspond to Donald Rubin's description of cognitive developmental models of the role of audience in composing:

> One of the more germane findings of studies of composing processes pertains to the temporal relationship between audience awareness ant other aspects of composing, invention in particular Cognitive developmental models tend to portray audience adaptation as a post hoc editing operation, imposing constraints on already fully formed content. Such models suggest that communicators encode events for themselves, and then recode them for audiences. (214)

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Table 1

Assignment for Essay One, First Version, English 101, Fall, 1984

Since people write best about what they know best, think of a subject about which you know more than most people do, whether that be chess or omelets, rock-climbing or scouting, horses or science fiction, a place or a person, the flute or the future, Agatha Christie mysteries, Bogart films, or Mash reruns. (Construct your own shorter list of possibilities.)

Your audience for this writing is, first, your instructor, since Freshman Composition is a course required by the college you are in, whatever major you have chosen or will choose, and since what you are writing will be evaluated. But your audience is also the other members of the class and perhaps even all readers of A Student's Guide to Freshman Composition (all of next year's freshmen, their instructors, and many Arizona high school seniors and their teachers). Regard this audience as consisting of educated fellow writers, persons interested in what genuinely interests other people. At the same time, they, like you, probably want to read only what is clearly and vividly written. This natural desire of readers means work for the writer.

Your primary purposes for writing this essay are probably to fulfill the writing assignment and to pass the course. But in order to do this, you need to assign yourself other purposes, such as to interest your audience (and yourself) by writing well about a subject of genuine interest to you (and therefore to us).

Any subject can be thought about in many ways. For this first assignment, think about your subject by observing its details and drawing inferences about them, by defining terms essential to it so that readers can understand it as you do, by classifying it into types or dividing it into its essential parts so that you can explain it more effectively to your readers, and by illustrating it with specific examples so that you can help your readers to experience it as you do. Your finished essay may include only the best of this thinking (in one or more of the modes just described), organized clearly into points (subideas or topic sentences), and details that support a central idea (assertion or thesis statement).

The finished essay should be about 700 words (the equivalent of three typed, double-spaced pages with one-inch margins). It should have a title to interest your readers and to indicate its subject. It should also contain essential information in a heading in the right-hand upper corner: your name, the course and section number, your instructor's name, and the date. (See Handbook, pp. 135-136, "The Final Copy.")

CCCC Convention
Minneapolis, March 1985
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Table 2

NAME _____

You have already considered several factors that are very important to the essay you're writing. First, you've been asked to write about a subject that you think you know a little bit better than most people do. Second, you've been given instruction on several modes of composition from which to choose the mode best suited to your specific topic. Third, your assignment sheet briefly discusses your purposes for writing this particular essay on this particular topic. And fourth, you have defined and done some thinking about the audience for your essay.

Careful attention to all of these factors should help you tremendously as you write your essay. There are, in addition, several more points which you should find helpful. Please consider the following points before writing your essay, and respond to them in writing on the back of this sheet.

First, briefly respond to the following four questions about your topic:

1.) Why did you choose this particular topic?

2.) What is it about this topic that interests you enough to write about it?

3.) How have you obtained your knowledge of this topic?

4.) Why do you feel that this topic is worthy of writing an essay about?

Now you should focus on several features of your audience which may affect the writing of your essay. Address the following points before you begin writing the essay. Please be as thorough and specific as possible.

5.) Make a list of those things your readers most likely already know about your topic.

6.) Now list those things which your readers probably don't know about your topic, and which they will need to know in order to understand your essay.

7.) Briefly explain how you decided what your audience's prior knowledge or lack of prior knowledge was about your topic. Try to explain how you knew what your audience did or did not know.

8.) Now take a few moments to really consider your answers to points 5,6, and 7 above. Now that you have focused on these points, how will you adapt your essay to accomodate your readers? Be as specific as possible.

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Table 3

NAME _____

Now that the rough draft of your essay has been returned to you and you are set to begin revising, there are many things for you to consider to determine how best to revise your essay. Central among your considerations will be the aspects of conceptual, organizational, and editorial revision which your text and instructor have discussed. Taking the time to carefully examine each of these considerations will help you along to a successful revision of your essay.

The following points are designed to help you get focused on some of the important aspects of revision. As you did when writing your essay, take the time to consider these points before you begin revising, and respond to them on the back of this sheet.

First, briefly respond to the following four questions, considering how each of the points raised will affect your revision:

1.) Are there any ideas you need to alter, add, or leave out? Briefly explain why or why not.

2.) Do you need to make any dramatic changes in the essay's overall organization? Explain why.

3.) Do you need to reorganize any of the paragraphs? How and why?

4.) How aware do you need to be of mechanics, punctuation, and grammar as you begin your revision?

Next you should focus on several features of your audience which may affect the revising of your essay. Address the following points before you begin the revision. Please be as thorough and specific as possible.

5.) Make a list of those things your readers most likely already know about your topic.

6.) Now list those things which your readers probably don't know about your topic, and which they will need to know in order to understand your essay.

7.) Briefly explain how you decided what your audience's prior knowledge or lack of prior knowledge was about your topic. Try to explain how you knew what your audience did or did not know.

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Table 5

Correlations Between Selected Sets of Variables

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diction/development	.66
syntax/organization	.64
syntax/coherence	.73
syntax/development	.70
organization/coherence	.85
organization/development	.86
coherence/development	.88
overall/audience	.83

Correlations for Gain Scores

organization/coherence	.69
organization/development	.71
overall/audience	.61

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